

VZCZCXRO3064
PP RUEHIK
DE RUEHAH #0149/01 0321412
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 011412Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4158
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6193
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0013
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4437
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000149

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR, CA/VO AND SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TX](#) [CVIS](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: IRANIAN VISA APPLICANTS BEGIN TO
TRICKLE IN

REF: 09 ASHGABAT 1460

ASHGABAT 00000149 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (C) Despite numerous email inquiries from Iranians to the Consular Section asking about applying for visas in Turkmenistan -- many who make appointments are ultimately no-shows -- it appears that the cumbersome Turkmen visa process still prevents most potential applicants from getting across the border to Ashgabat (reftel). Recently, however, the Consular Section has seen a slight increase in Iranian applicants. They report to us that its proximity to Iran, and the absence of an interview backlog, makes Ashgabat an attractive alternative to applying in either the UAE or Turkey.

¶2. (C) During the past week, we spoke with three Iranian applicants. One had traveled from Esfahan. In addition, a couple from the northern city of Shirvan, who said that despite the cost (most contracted with a travel agency, who arranged for the visa, land transport from the border, hotel and registration), about \$2000 for a 3-4 day stay, it was the easiest way to apply. Since Iranian applicants require extra processing and there is no way to courier passports to them in Iran, they must make the trip twice.

ESFAHAN: "IF YOU HAVE A FAMILY, IT'S NOT WORTH THE RISK"

¶3. (C) Ali, a 28-year engineer from Esfahan, was applying for an H1-B (skilled professional) visa to work in Iowa. He was married recently and his wife, also an engineer, has a separate petition pending and plans to work for the same firm. Ali described the demonstrations in Esfahan last summer following the disputed presidential election. He said he participated in three of them and that the largest, on Quds Day, had about one million participants. He described the security forces as "merciless" in the violence they used against them. After he learned of his U.S. visa prospects, Ali chose to stay home and avoid involvement. "When you have a family, it's a huge risk to demonstrate. If someone gets arrested, there will be no one to care for their children, for their parents."

¶4. (C) Ali said that his own parents were involved in the movement to oust the Shah in the late 70's, but now feel "ashamed" at what that brought about. Notwithstanding

Esfahan's general more conservative populace, he said, the people there are "fed up with the mullahs" and want Iran's leaders to be "tried for their crimes." He advised that the only way to bring an end to the "dictatorship" in Iran would be to freeze the foreign bank accounts of Iran's leaders and the Revolutionary Guards (IRCG). "The people of Iran are looking to the U.S. for support," he said.

FROM SHIRVAN: "PLEASE RESCUE US FROM THESE MULLAHS"

15. (C) Hussein and Fatemeh, an elderly couple from the northern city of Shirvan, plan to visit their son, who is studying for a Ph.D in Pennsylvania. When asked about the situation at home, they said, "Everyone wants this regime to be gone. People want freedom." Fatemeh described how, following Friday prayers in Shirvan, people leaving the mosques are compelled to take part in pro-government rallies. One of the few Iranian women in Ashgabat we've seen wearing hijab, Fatemeh said that she had always worn it. "Even back when the Shah was in power." Nevertheless, she disagrees vehemently with laws that force all women to cover in public. "It should be up to women to decide," she said, "not the mullahs." Hussein, who attends Friday prayers regularly, said, "All we have now are mosques. Under the Shah, there was a liquor store on one corner and a mosque on the next. We're tired of everything being imposed on us." Both said that "everyone in Iran" wants the country to reestablish relations with the U.S. "Because of Ahmadinejad, we have poor relations with every country in the world with the exception of China and Venezuela. It's a disgrace." Hussein added, "We're counting on Obama to rescue us from these mullahs."

16. (C) COMMENT: From just these three cases, it is difficult

ASHGABAT 00000149 002.2 OF 002

to conclude -- though it would certainly appear -- that there are many in Iran as vehemently anti-regime as we have seen so far. It is interesting to note, however, that individuals who, at first glance, seemed to be from widely different backgrounds share such strong feelings about the direction Iran is going. We will continue to monitor and report on public opinion as visa applicants from northern Iran trickle in. END COMMENT.
CURRAN